

Viewing Sustainable Strategy of Fast and Slow Fashion Businesses Model through the Lens of Triple Bottom Line Theory

Md Abdullahil Kafi, Chuanlan Liu, Chunmin Lang, Louisiana State University

Keywords: Fast Fashion, Slow Fashion, Sustainability, Triple Bottom Line theory

Slow fashion has been praised as a facilitator to promote sustainability through creating an aware group of designers, retailers, and consumers who will consider impacts of products on workers, communities, and ecosystems (Ertekin & Atik, 2015; Pal, 2016). Meanwhile, fast fashion has been criticized as unsustainable in nature due to the inherent characteristics of frequent assortment changes that put enormous pressure on manufacturing, distribution as well as the entire supply chain (Desai, Nassar, & Chertow, 2012; Pal, 2016). Interestingly, many fast fashion companies actually have been addressing sustainability issues, and they are taking numerous initiatives as part of their corporate social responsibilities (Pal, 2016). In fact, both slow and fast fashion business models promote sustainability using different strategies and approaches. However, there exists a lack of systematic comparison to better understand how both slow and fast fashion businesses are addressing sustainability related issues. To fill this gap, the present qualitative study seeks to conduct a methodical comparison of sustainable strategies between fast and slow fashion business models.

Triple Bottom Line (TBL) theory has been considered as a base to assess economic, social and environmental outcomes for various businesses in different industry sectors, and therefore is adopted as a theoretical framework for the current study. TBL theory suggests that any business entity should emphasize the better performance balance among economy, environment, and society to pursue not only economic profits but also environmental and societal betterment (Wilson, 2015). We examined sustainable strategies and implementation scheme of both business models along the design, production, distribution, and consumption value chain (see Table 1).

Secondary data was collected through comprehensive literature search. Ten prominent fast fashion companies' sustainable reports (Five from European based and Five from USA based-published in between 2013 to 2015) were included in data analysis. Given the fact that slow fashion as a business model is still in its early development stage, and is adopted and promoted mainly by small and local businesses, there is no public cooperate document available. Therefore, we searched online and selected five slow fashion companies' websites to collect information regarding their sustainability initiatives. In addition, ten peer-reviewed research articles from reputed journals that focus on slow fashion development were selected and included in data analysis.

Guided by the proposed theoretical framework, the initial analysis was conducted using the auto-coding technique provided by Nvivo 11 plus software. Then the "open coding" technique and constant comparison processes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) were applied to connect and conceptualize identified themes and items. Results show that social and environmental sustainability strategy is mostly identical across both slow fashion and fast fashion business models. However, to be economically sustainable, they follow different strategies. Table 1 shows a summary of major findings. For instance, slow fashion business addresses sustainability issues from the manufacturing to post consumption stages. It promotes local economies, small entrepreneurs, resource consumption reduction, caring of peoples, and strong bonding among the entire value chain. On the

other hand, fast fashion businesses address issues through using eco-friendly raw materials, fair wage, workplace safety, corporate social responsibility, setting suppliers' criteria set, and reducing carbon emission and energy consumption. Our research findings indicate that pursuing sustainability can be achieved by fashion businesses in different ways, and using different profit models. While retailers are taking care of sustainability using different strategies, future research is necessary from consumers' perspectives to better understand whether consumers have any influences for retailers to adopt certain strategies and what approaches they can take to shape retailers sustainable strategies in a more efficient and effective way.

Table 1. The Framework of Sustainable Strategies Comparison across Fast and Slow fashion Businesses

Value Chain /Outcomes	Economic		Social		Environmental	
	Fast	Slow	Fast	Slow	Fast	Slow
Design	Stylish low quality items; Low margin with high turnover	High quality exclusive items. Higher margin with low turnover	Animal rights, no fur, no leather slogan	Retain traditional value through creativity	Nontoxic, organic raw materials.	Organic and eco-friendly raw-materials Local materials
Production	Go global for low cost manufacturing destination	Use local raw materials or labor	Responsible sourcing by ensuring workplace safety, fair wage	Offer a good stress free life to the people involved	Innovative technology like nontoxic dyeing, reducing water use	Reduce waste through alternative uses of waste, post consumption reuse, redesign
Distribution	Open enormous number of outlets globally	Empower local economy and try to reduce pressure on distribution channel	Advocate to using less paper to its employee.	Offer opportunity for small entrepreneurs, advocating equity of producers and distributors	Reduce carbon emission in product transportation, energy saving in the outlets	Using energy efficient technology in its outlets
Consumption	Producing loyal consumers by offering low priced stylish fleeting items	Creating loyal consumers by offering long lasting products	Do charity with the collected used items	Cares consumers' self-identity through redesign and co-design	Offer limited reuse or collection of used products.	Offer post purchase reuse and redesign.

References:

- Desai, A., Nassar, N., & Chertow, M. (2012). An exploration of hybrid fast fashion and domestic manufacturing models in relocalised apparel production. *The Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, 45, 53-78.
- Ertekin, Z. O., & Atik, D. (2015). Sustainable markets motivating factors, barriers, and remedies for mobilization of slow fashion. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 35(1), 53-69.
- Pal, R. (2016). Sustainable Value Generation through Post-retail Initiatives: An Exploratory Study of Slow and Fast Fashion Businesses. In *Green Fashion* (pp. 127-158). Springer Singapore.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Wilson, J. P. (2015). The triple bottom line: undertaking an economic, social, and environmental retail sustainability strategy. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 43(4/5), 432-447.